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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NIAMEY 000608

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SUBJECT: NIGER: AF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY MOSS VISIT

REF: 07 NIAMEY 1444

Classified By: Ambassador Bernadette M. Allen, Reasons:1.4(a) and (d)

11. (SBU) Summary.

On June 1, 2008, Department of State Bureau for African Affairs (AF) Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) Todd Moss met with several Government of Niger (GON) officials (including President Mamadou Tandja) and a human rights organization, participated in a national press interview related to the Tandja meeting and, at a dinner hosted by Ambassador Allen, discussed with several Mission Chiefs accredited to Niger issues of common interest (e.g., food security, conflict in northern Niger, human rights issues, 2009 elections.) The same topics were covered with Tandja and GON officials, as well as discussions about military cooperation, energy, banditry and smuggling (arms, drugs). Tandja rejected the suggestion of an outside mediator to negotiate peace between the rebels and the GON; all the GON officials we met were in lock step with Tandja's view that the conflict is a matter for Nigeriens alone to resolve. Fighting banditry and smuggling of arms, drugs and cigarettes is high on the GON action list and the GON hopes, with assistance from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), to host a regional conference on these issues before end September 2008. The National Human Rights Association (known by its French acronym ANDDH) leadership complained about lack of access to the conflict zone, a hinderance to the organization's ability to investigate allegations of human rights abuses.

12. (U) AF DAS Moss met with GON President Tandja, the Ministers of Justice (Dagra Mamadou), Interior and Decentralization (Albade Adouba), Foreign Affairs Secretary General (Dan Maradi) and High Commissioner for the Restoration of Peace (Mohamed Anacko). Ambassador Allen accompanied DAS Moss to all the GON meetings and DCM Koran accompanied him to the ANDDH meeting. Three FSN LES Assistants (POL, ECON, and Protocol) shared interpreter duties. (Note: The Prime Minister, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Finance were out of the country to attend the 4TH Tokyo Summit on Development in Africa. End note.) End summary.

13. (SBU) Negotiation only between Nigeriens.

The meeting with Tandja lasted about 90 minutes. Much of the discussion with Tandja centered around the conflict in northern Niger, including questions about Mouvement des Nigeriens pour la Justice (MNJ) demands and whether the GON is inclined to accept a mediator from a neighboring country to negotiate a peace settlement. Tanda strongly rejected the suggestion of a mediator and stated Nigeriens who have elected their own democratic, sovereign government can manage

their own internal affairs. He suggested that in due time, sooner rather than later, the conflict will be resolved. He insisted the MNJ must lay down its arms before the GON will sit at the negotiating table. He reported that 7 of 11 fronts had already laid down their weapons, met with him and the Prime Minister in the Presidential office and had now returned to their families. He rhetorically asked how many governments would meet with armed bandits and drug traffickers to discuss a settlement, that the GON already has gone a step farther than he believes the leadership in other democratic nations would go to deal with criminals. Other GON officials echoed Tandja's view that the conflict is a matter to be negotiated between Nigeriens, and that talks cannot begin until the MNJ rebels lay down their arms. When asked about a regional security conference, Albade responded there may be a meeting between Mali, Niger and Algeria on Tuareg-related issues, possibly in late June (venue to be determined).

Moss asked Tandja and Albade in their respective meetings to share their views about the MNJ demands. Both men responded they have no clear understanding of what the MNJ demands are, that the GON has never received any formal list of grievances. Albade added that demands printed in local newspapers have little validity because the GON had met most all the demands, such as integrating former rebels into the military, reserving 15 percent of revenues generated from natural resources in Agadez for the Agadez region. He suggested that Agadez is already favored above other regions, that it not only gets the 15 percent, but also benefits from the remaining 85 percent that is shared nationally. Other regions, much poorer than Agadez, are not demanding that a

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certain level of revenue earned from natural resources in their respective regions be reserved for them. He said natural resources are national wealth for the entire nation, not just one region.

¶4. (C) Human rights concerns.

Moss then raised the matter of the seven civilians killed in December 2007 (reftel) by military personnel and the status of the GON investigation of the incident. He emphasized that until there is some accountability for the killings, military-to-military programs will be severely affected because the USG cannot ignore its legal obligations. He stressed that Congress could suspend a number of programs, if not satisfied that the GON respects human rights. Tandja replied that the matter is in the hands of the GON Ministry of Justice. He then took pains to state that he retired his military gear to defend democracy, said that almost a decade ago he had military officers tried for alleged human rights violations, that those found guilty served time and those not found guilty were freed. He insisted that he and his government believe in the democratic process, the rule of law and expect justice to be served. With respect to the killed civilians, he said that family members of the victims had visited him in his office to discuss the case and the ongoing investigation.

¶5. (U) Food security.

Moss stressed to Tandja the importance of the Government of Niger (GON) making known its food security needs quickly. He emphasized that many other countries on the continent are being aggressive in making their respective needs known in order to secure a place at the top of the food assistance list. Tandja responded that the GON is working on the matter and announced that the GON will use the USDA 12,000 tons of sorghum that have been in storage for free distribution to the most vulnerable communities.

¶6. (U) Thugs and smuggling.

Tandja and the other GON officials (i.e., Ministers of

Justice and Interior) raised concerns about banditry and smuggling of arms, drugs and cigarettes. The Ministry of Interior is charged, in coordination with the UNODC, to plan a regional conference to address banditry and smuggling across the Sahel countries, to be held in Niamey before end-September 2008. In response to Moss, question as to whether some donor partner countries would be invited to participate in the conference, Albade implied that invitations likely would be tendered to some partners, given the need for financial assistance and technical expertise.

¶7. (U) Energy.

Prompted by an electrification chart posted in the Presidential Office Building, Moss briefly touched on Niger energy policy. He asked Tandja whether the GON had any solar energy plans in the works. Tandja replied the GON was primarily looking at potential to expand hydroelectricity power once the Kandadji Dam project is completed. He agreed solar energy is a good fit for Niger, but said technology and technical expertise in Niger is lacking. He made mention of Niger's energy potential and other benefits resulting from its uranium deposits and gas prospects.

¶8. (U) Elections in 2009.

Moss addressed questions about the 2009 local, legislative and Presidential elections to Justice Minister Dagra. He asked whether there will be further postponement of elections, given the initial timeframe for local elections already had slipped. Dagra responded that voter registration is on track to begin on June 19. Amb. Allen inquired whether the conflict in the north would cause that region to be excluded from the registration process. Dagra responded that the conflict should be over soon, if not, persons in the conflict zone will not be disenfranchised, that some accommodation will be made for citizens living in the north. He stated, at worst, citizens could report to the larger cities (Agadez or Arlit) to register, that population numbers have been very small in the north (even pre-conflict) because of the nomadic lifestyle. He mentioned budgetary concerns to fund the registration process and actual elections in 2009. He said a new registration list is direly needed because the current rolls include names of deceased persons, too many common names without reliable identifiers (such as date of birth), duplicate registrations with different addresses, etc.

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¶9. High Commissioner for the Restoration of Peace (HCRP).

Moss asked HCRP Anacko his take on the prospects for peace. His view mirrored that of other GON officials; that is, the GON is prepared to meet MNJ rebels only after they lay down their arms. He emphasized that the laying down of arms is not in the literal sense, that the GON is not trying to humiliate the rebels. Amb. Allen inquired how the newly created Front des Forces de Redressement (FFR) would affect potential negotiations. Anacko responded that the new group does complicate matters, but that he expected all along from his own past experience as a front leader in the 1990 rebellion that splinter groups (some based on clan affiliation) would begin to materialize. He expressed concern about conflict between herders and farmers along the Niger-Mali border and asked Moss whether the USG provides training in peace negotiating. Moss responded that many private institutions facilitate such training and stated he would inquire whether the Woodrow Wilson Center and/or the U.S. Institute of Peace may have interest in offering training. Amb. Allen asked Anacko whether he had participated in an IVLP program on peace negotiation and he responded that it was his predecessor of some years ago who had participated in an IVLP on conflict resolution.

¶10. (SBU) ANDDH meeting.

In their meeting with Moss, the leadership of the National Human Rights Association (known by its French acronym ANDDH) reviewed human rights trends in Niger, particularly since the 1999 democratic transition. While there has been progress in many areas, problems remain. The conflict in the north has resulted in illegal detentions, the arrest of journalists, and travel restriction. It has seriously affected agriculture and tourism in the north, and has led to the displacement of large numbers of people. The ANDDH officials complained that GON restrictions make it difficult to investigate human rights allegations, but they have confirmed a number of abuses based on interviews with people from the north, including the mayor of Dabagaba. They have asked the GON for permission to travel in the north, as well as to interview the Nigerien soldiers who were recently released by the MNJ.

The 2009 election will be key to Niger's democratic transformation. The officials said that there has been little improvement in the status of women, and noted the National Assembly's refusal to ratify the AU women's rights protocol. ANDDH considers access to education, health care and food as human rights, and detailed problems in those sectors. The ANDDH officials said that the GON has been slow to enact measures to combat trafficking in persons, and reviewed their own activities to address that problem.

¶10. Working dinner.

The Ambassadors of France, Germany and the European Union and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative (who concurrently serves as the UN System Coordinator in Niger) discussed matters related to the conflict in the north, food security and the 2009 elections (everyone was concerned about the lateness of GON requests for funding for the registration and election process). Remarks around the table validated much of what Moss learned in the day's earlier meetings.

AF DAS Moss has cleared this message.

ALLEN